Extinction as usual?: Geo-social futures and left optimism

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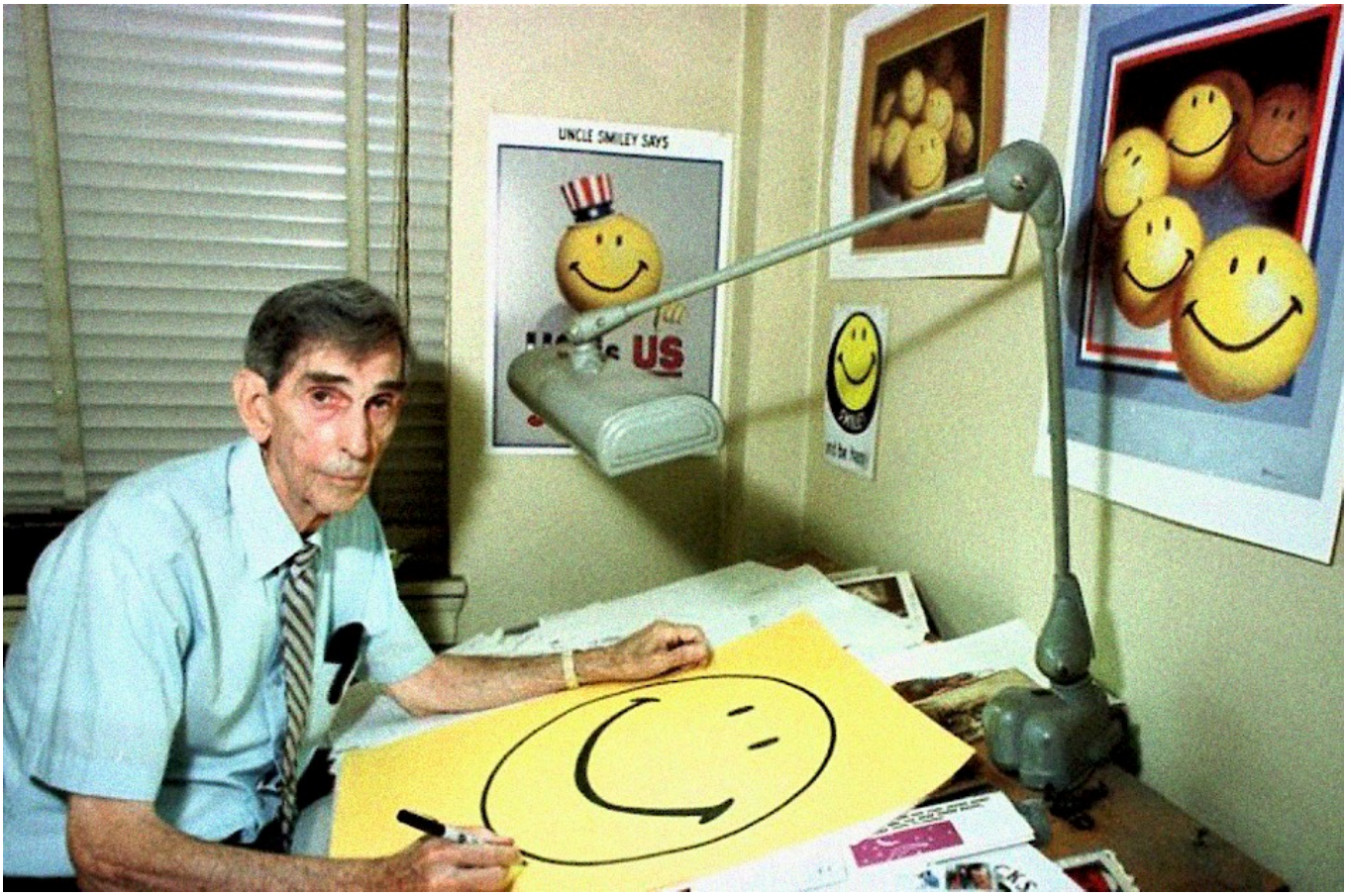
Back to Geo-Social Futures

The concept of the Anthropocene, the so-called geological age of man, has become pervasive in recent years, marking one of those rare instances when an idea from the natural sciences gains wider purchase on the popular imagination, as evolution, thermodynamics, and Gaia have before it. Although the concept remains contentious within the Earth sciences – the International Commission on Stratigraphy is debating whether it should be adopted within the scientific periodization of the Earth's history – for the moment this appears no obstacle to its growing popularity across domains that typically have little truck with geology, including of course the art world, where it remains a favored curatorial device, and academia, where it is the subject of innumerable conferences and symposia. Whether or not it will turn out to be a concept of enduring significance or a passing intellectual meme remains to be seen, but a growing body of critique is emerging from within both the humanities and the environmental movement.

Much of this critical discussion on the Anthropocene has thus far focused on highlighting the ways in which appeals to the agency of a supposedly universal "Anthropos" conceal the historically specific forms of social power that have resulted in Earth systems change.[1] Stratigraphic debate in the Earth sciences about identifying appropriate markers for its origins is increasingly shadowed by debates in the humanities that locate its emergence with European colonialism, the development of industrial capitalism, or Cold War nuclear militarism. Some have suggested that "Capitaloscene" is a better designation, given the fundamental role played by global capitalism in transforming the planetary environment, while others are calling for the "decolonization" of the Anthropocene.[2] Indeed such debates have fed back into the Earth sciences, where scientific controversies have themselves become politicized, with, for example, a recent paper published in *Nature* by Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin of University College London suggesting that evidence exists for locating the origins of the Anthropocene in the European colonization of the Americas.[3] Less remarked upon has been what geo-social futures may be possible and desirable in light of these contested entanglements of social and geological histories.

It is now common to find geo-social futures evoked within the horizon of extinction. A recent scientific paper arguing that there is no longer any doubt that the Earth is undergoing its sixth mass extinction was widely reported upon in mainstream media, but this was only the latest



Harvey Ball, creator of the smiley face, autographs posters in his office on July 6, 1998.

in a slew of ominous warnings issued by eminent research institutions.[4] Although the prospect of imminent extinction might provide fodder for cheap nihilism, and imagining *The Earth After Us* arguably aids awareness of just how grave the consequences of anthropogenic environmental change may be, it is perhaps more urgent and fruitful to address how to live *with* and *through* seemingly inevitable catastrophic environmental change.[5] It is important to remember that (to paraphrase what William Gibson has said of "the future") environmental catastrophe is already here – it's just not evenly distributed. For many, environmental devastation is a lived reality rather than a matter of philosophical speculation or apocalyptic foreboding, let alone long-term planning. Hence, questioning geo-social futures not only implies imagining extinction, or "learning how to die," but also thinking about how best to collectively organize life in light of the uneven responsibilities for, and vulnerabilities to, anthropogenic planetary changes already well underway.[6]

"We Have Seen What We Can Do, and It's Awesome"

In June 2015 the "new environmentalist" think tank The Breakthrough Institute hosted a three-day conference on the theme of "The Good Anthropocene" at its headquarters in Oakland, California. The conference brought together natural and social scientists and popular science writers including Diane Ackerman, Steve Fuller, Bruno Latour, and Mark Lynas, as well as one of their harshest critics, the Australian environmentalist Clive Hamilton. Given that, for many, including Paul Crutzen – the climate scientist who popularized the term – the Anthropocene is a concept indicating the profound depth of the planetary environmental crisis, it may seem counterintuitive to prefix it with the deeply oxymoronic adjective "good." But shaking up conventional environmental thinking was one of the aims.

The idea of the good Anthropocene originated with Erle Ellis, a landscape ecologist at the University of Maryland and a senior fellow at The Breakthrough Institute. Ellis advocates what he calls "postnatural environmentalism" and argues that we should "forget Mother Nature" and recognize that "this is a world of our making."[7] He claims that "nature is gone," and that humans have shaped the natural environment for millennia, even at the planetary scale.[8] Thus, Ellis advises liberating ourselves from pious mystifications about a pure, wild nature that existed before the modern period, and suggests that "rather than look back in despair [we] look ahead to what we can achieve."[9] For him, the Anthropocene means that we are "living on a used planet," that there is "no returning to our comforting cradle," and that, rather than an occasion for regret, this presents an opportunity to celebrate human ingenuity: "We have seen what we can do, and its awesome," he wrote in 2011.[10] According to Ellis, if we first "stop trying to save the planet," then we can embrace the Anthropocene and our new role as "the creators, engineers, and permanent global stewards of a sustainable human nature" – and he insists that "we" does mean all of us.[11]

For Ellis, postnatural environmentalism raises important but neglected questions: "Can we create a good Anthropocene? In the distant future will we be able to look back with pride?"[12] Like all visions of the future, Ellis's optimistic concept of a geo-social future where humans can be proud of an "artificial earth" is based on his understanding of the past.[13] Ellis is a prominent advocate of the controversial early Anthropocene hypothesis, which traces humans' planetary impact to the advent of agriculture some eight thousand years ago. For Ellis, the early Anthropocene legitimates the good Anthropocene, because if humans have always shaped the natural environment, however unintentionally, then there is nothing essentially different about intentionally managing the entire planet as technical capacities increase. He assures us that, "we humans can totally trash the planet and still survive. We already have in many ways."[14] The logical sleight of hand upon which Ellis's argument hinges and by which he seeks to jump scale without complication is, of course, glaring: rice farming, *therefore* geoengineering.

Ellis's good Anthropocene has been welcomed by those associated with so-called new environmentalism or eco-pragmatism. New environmentalism is not a formally organized movement but rather a loosely related assemblage of thinkers and institutions who, despite differences, share common ideas: the eclipse of "wild" nature; conservation as the production rather than the salvation of nature; technological progress as the key to sustainable environments; marketizing nature as a key element of environmentalism; the rejection of scarcity as a necessary horizon; the capacity of human ingenuity to transcend planetary boundaries; and the rejection of much of what has traditionally been identified as environmentalism.[15] Indeed, these thinkers adopt the idea of "planetary stewardship" not as a difficult yet necessary task in the face of looming catastrophe, but as a calling to embrace humanity's role as planetary masters.[16] Mark Lynas starkly expressed this attitude at the Good Anthropocene conference:

> For the essential truth of the Anthropocene is this: neither God nor Gaia is in charge. We are. We now get to decide everything from the pH of the oceans to the temperature of the biosphere to the very composition and future evolutionary path of life on Earth. Ducking or denying this responsibility will not make it go away. By virtue of our global influence, we have landed ourselves with this awesome task of planetary management. The Anthropocene is best understood not as a passive state, but an active one.[17]

It should be emphasized that these debates are not confined to obscure corners of academic conjecture but operate across different public forums, shaping policy around topics like climate change, conservation, energy technologies, and economic development.[18] Despite the global ambition of these discussions, for the most part they remain deeply US centric, but this is precisely the reason for their outsize cultural and political influence.

The idea of the good Anthropocene was given a major publicity boost in 2014 when *New York Times* journalist Andrew Revkin blogged about a keynote speech where he took up the idea. Revkin argued that "with work ... we can have a successful journey this century ... We are going to do OK."[19] He was sharply rebuked by Hamilton in a series of stinging articles where he claimed that those "who argue for the good Anthropocene are unscientific and live in a fantasy world of their own creation."[20]

> The idea of the good Anthropocene is based on a fundamental misreading of science. It arises from the failure to make the cognitive leap from ecological thinking – the science of the relationship between organisms and their local environments – to Earth system thinking, the science of the Whole Earth as a complex system beyond the sum of its parts.[21]

Hamilton argued that the good Anthropocene is a depoliticizing narrative that works to perpetuate the interest of those conservative forces working determinedly to prevent action on climate mitigation and renewable energy. "It ignores the fundamental problem here, and that is the exercise of political power to stop governments from imposing policies that will facilitate the transition to the low-carbon future."[22]

This controversy was rekindled with the

In 2014, a thirty-six-year-old wooden roller coaster in Valencia, California dramatically caught fire and partially collapsed.

publication of the *The Ecomodernist Manifesto*, a pamphlet laying out a rose-tinted new environmentalist vision of the "Great Anthropocene" that can be achieved by turning away from conventional environmentalist principles.[23] Published by The Breakthrough Institute, it carried signatures from a long list of affiliates, including Ellis and Lynas. The manifesto repeats Ellis's interpretation of the early Anthropocene hypothesis, affirming that the "Earth is a human planet" and that "humankind's extraordinary powers" can be used "in service of creating a good Anthropocene," while the idea of "fixed physical boundaries to human consumption" is declared to be "so theoretical as to be functionally irrelevant." A good Anthropocene, the manifesto declares, "demands that humans use their growing social, economic and technological powers to make life better for people, stabilize the climate, and protect the natural world." To this end, the manifesto's central claim is that intensifying industrial food production and expanding nuclear energy would require less land and provide greater material well-being for an increasing global population, allowing the "decoupling [of] human development from environment impacts" so that "humanity's material dependency upon nature might be less destructive." Thus, intensifying technological development will allow economic growth to be unburdened of environmental costs. Indeed, the manifesto argues that "meaningful climate mitigation is fundamentally a technological challenge," a matter of inevitable technical innovation rather than a question of political will and cooperation.

The manifesto has drawn a wide array of critiques from environmentalists and eco-critics, including, unsurprisingly, from the perspective of degrowth.[24] Hamilton issued a scathing attack on the manifesto, highlighting how it blatantly disregards established climate science on ideological grounds, instead putting faith in an "old-fashioned American technofix" to solve the problems of climate change – a type of techno-fetishism that is, Hamilton argues, only possible because politics has been emptied out of the manifesto's account of the world.[25] Bruno Latour likewise noted the absence of the political: "From the Manifesto I get enthusiasm, anger, dressing downs, but I don't get politics."[26] Echoing his recent turn to the work of Carl Schmitt, Latour scolds the "ecomoderns" for their antagonistic deficit:

> You should be able to define your friends and your enemies. Who are you fighting? Who are you allying yourself with? What are the amity lines you want to draw? I keep hearing talks against those who want to have or to impose limits. But … drawing limits between friends and enemies is what politics is all about.[27]

Further, he points out that the manifesto is "written entirely as if humans were still alone on the stage," and hence assumes an anachronistic conception of the division between Man and Nature that fails to engage with the complex "reality of entanglement" the Anthropocene has revealed. Hence, according to Latour, not only is the manifesto missing politics, but it fails to provide any basis upon which political thinking may be "able to absorb the Anthropocene, namely the reaction of the Earth system to our action, in a way that renders politics again comprehensible."[28] Hence, for Latour as for Hamilton, the "Good Anthropocene" imagined by The Breakthrough Institute and its new environmentalist fellow travelers is an ideological mirage that places faith in a future of seamless eco-technological ease rather than addressing the tensions of the political. As such, Hamilton notes, it is "system compatible" with the headlong rush of the status quo into devastation.[29]

Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will?

At the Good Anthropocene conference, Lynas advised environmentalists that "there is nothing so liberating as letting go of your pessimism," and insisted that the difference between "the 'worst of times' planet [and] the 'best of times' planet" is principally a matter of attitude. Likewise the authors of *The Ecomodernist Manifesto* state that "we embrace an optimistic view towards human capacities and the future," and Ellis has asked "what good is environmentalism if it makes you depressed about the future?" Hamilton rebuts this optimism on two fronts. Firstly, he says that it is a sunny form of aggression used as a "means of gaining the moral upper hand."[30] Secondly, that it is grounded in and promotes a faulty view of reality shaped by a quasi-religious belief in technological progress. In the view of ecomodernists, "the only barrier to a grand new era for humanity is self-doubt and the 'pessimism' of gloomy scientists … The Power of positive thinking can't turn malignant tumors into benign growths, and it can't turn planetary overreach into endless lifestyle improvements."[31]

Similarly, Latour highlights that for ecomodernists, "catastrophism [is] a sort of human ideology imposed on a situation that would remain, in itself, fairly quiet and stable, let's say fairly Holocene."[32] However, environmental catastrophe is, Latour cautions, not imaginative fancy, "but a reality that blind

Pope Francis snuggles a baby lamb at the living nativity scene at a church outside Rome on January 6, 2014. *The Huffington Post*, January 7, 2014.

faith in outmoded conceptions of progress cannot exorcize." For Latour, such optimism is a dangerous delusion:

> Wake up you ecomoderns, we are in the Anthropocene, not in the Holocene, nor are we ever to reside in the enchanted dream of futurism … As usual, those who fight against apocalyptic talk and catastrophism are the ones who are so far *beyond* doomsday that they seriously believe that nothing will happen to them and that they can continue forever, just as before.[33]

It may be hard to disagree with Hamilton's and Latour's assessments; however, there seems to be a risk here for eco-critics, particularly those of the Left: necessary critique of the false optimism peddled by The Breakthrough Institute and their ilk might lead to a rejection of optimism as such – a risk that a pessimistic orientation towards geo-social futures will become the default setting for Leftist environmentalism. It may seem that pessimism as a philosophical stance is the preserve of only a few scattered fringes of contemporary intellectual life – the "dark ecology" promoted in Paul Kingsnorth's Dark Mountain project, the "cosmic pessimism" of Eugene Thacker, the "antinatalism" of Jim Crawford, which was given a popular platform by the television show *True Detective*, or even the anonymous anarchist text *Desert*. Yet confining ourselves to this list would be to recognize pessimistic orientations only where they are explicitly declared, when in fact pessimism towards geo-social futures seems to be a much more common stance, even if it appears in nuanced, more qualified forms.[34] If we think of pessimism as an affective sensibility, or even an aesthetic disposition, as opposed to a theoretically articulated – or even consciously held – position, it might be considered more prevalent in Leftist thought than some may care to admit.

The problem with pessimism from a political perspective is that it is not very conducive to forging collectives around shared projects and common struggles. Indeed, this may be the point – to let hot air out of inflated dreams – but a pessimistic sensibility seems more likely to cultivate politically debilitating affects, such as melancholic paralysis and resignation in the face of existing forms of power, or even to fuel fears. However unintentionally, pessimism can tacitly legitimate the lessons of individualized quietude taught by conservatives who tell us that the "small, happy life" offers deliverance from the dangerous delusion of collective transformation.[35] Just as blind optimism risks lubricating existing forms of power, an equally blind pessimism risks stunting the collective capacities required to oppose them.

Optimism remains a crucial affective resource for galvanizing political struggles, particularly important in forging enduring alliances across plural collectives dispersed in space and diverse in ethos – exactly the type of articulations needed to ensure more socially just and ecologically sustainable geo-social futures. This is why it is crucial not to cede optimism to reactionary forces or dismiss it as utopian naïveté. Without some basic acceptance of the idea that through collective effort our relations with one another and the planet can be transformed for the better, why would we act at all? Rejecting this possibility would be to consent to an existence that is all stick and no carrot, a purely defensive life governed by ad hoc reactions, that would elevate the contingent ideology of neoliberal individualism into an inescapable anthropological fact and reduce each of us to a little *Katechon* securing the best worst option until shit really hits the fan. Adopting a worldview from which all optimism has been expunged would in effect naturalize the existing catastrophic trajectories of global capitalism and militarized colonialism as inevitable and accept that indeed "there is no other way," not due to faith in the brilliance of the plan but because of a lack of recognition that collective capacities may challenge it.

Yet if some form of optimism is to be embraced, then the question with regard to geo-social futures is whether a distinction can be made between those who locate optimism in existing trajectories of global capitalism – accepting a depoliticized account of the relationship between social and natural processes and uncritically positing technological development as the medium of social progress for a universal humanity – and those who locate optimism in struggles already under way against these very same trajectories – arguing that despite the brutality, dislocations, and extinctions of modernization, it has also produced the conditions, platforms, and capacities from which other worlds and new collectives might be born, even within the wreckage of all that has been lost. I would hazard to say that these distinct modes of optimism can and should be distinguished. However, while rejecting the false optimism of The Breakthrough Institute may be relatively easy, articulating alternative conceptions of optimism within the present politico-planetary horizon is a task fraught with tension.

Optimism implies a certain assessment of the possibilities for beneficial change (or continuity) over time, but how is historical change to be conceived at a geo-social juncture

marked by the collision of social and Earth histories? And who may it be beneficial for? How does this unprecedented planetary-scale convergence of social and environmental processes impact our ability to tie political struggles, and political affects such as optimism, to actions and aims? The vector of inevitable progress along which the moderns' optimism was plotted has now buckled under pressure from externalities that can no longer be ignored, and its promise of a better future is no longer clear. The planetary stage upon which world history was to be played out has itself entered the drama of the political, contorting the neutral spatial environment through which the arrow of progress was believed to pass. In light of these new historical conditions heralded by the concept of the Anthropocene (or Capitaloscene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene, Gynocene, Manthropocene, whichever is preferred for the moment), the whole armory of concepts, practices, subjects, and relations with which modern politics has been mapped must be retooled.[36] Optimism is no exception. Optimism can no longer operate within the horizon of a secularized paradise and the promise of perfection – whether of justice, freedom, or comfort – but must remain committed to *betterment* within planetary conditions almost inevitably set to *worsen*, however unevenly and unsteadily. The *better* geo-social future that hope and struggle must be oriented towards might now be defined in terms of *less bad*. Though it remains necessary to cultivate optimism as a political affect, it has been robbed of some of its traditional emotional charge, mirroring the ambiguous state of geo-social futures.

Even if the Left's position on geo-social futures is to embrace optimism, it must do so in such a way that the collective capacity to mourn what has been lost is not forgotten in the rush to blast open the doors of heaven. Cultivating the conditions for optimism must not be confused with celebrating a sunny machismo. I agree with those who insist that the Left must reclaim its orientation to the future (even if the conception of history this future implies remains uncertain), but this should not come at the expense of repressing collective grief and forgetting mutual care, modes of relation that cannot be compensated for with militant gusto but which will be necessary if any better world is to truly be better.[37] Further, even if optimism means resisting the secularized eschatology of catastrophism, it does not mean spinning the yarn that everything will be okay, and certainly not that all problems simply require the correct tools ("a shoddy workman blames his tools," as they say). Far too often in Leftist political thought a false dichotomy is imposed between techno-critics and techno-utopians. Seeing the potential role of technology in achieving the aims of the Left's politics or for guaranteeing a better geo-social future does not necessarily make one a techno-utopian, but this is all too often the assumption, with critics jumping to the conclusion that those who see benefits in infrastructure and advances in biological science, chemistry, and engineering must also be advocates of Monsanto and geoengineering, or must regard forms of indigenous knowledge as expendable primitivism.

Much of this absurdity arises because these conversations too often revolve around the metaphysically inflated phantom of Technology as such rather than engaging the specific ways in which particular technologies are put to use for certain ends within distinct social assemblages. While the assumption that technology is inherently bad should certainly be rejected, this does not imply that technology is inherently good or even neutral. Concern would be more productively focused on questioning what particular technologies do, how they are used, by whom, to what end, and how open they are to repurposing. Obviously, not all technologies are vectors of liberation – but equally clear is that they are not all apparatuses of instrumental reason that ensnare us ever more deeply in webs of control and alienate us from our authentic being. Breaking with these inflated critiques of technology on the Left does not imply a necessary break with the principles of environmentalism, as in *The Ecomodernist Manifesto*. Rather, it means taking a more sober approach to the question of how technologies may play a part in transforming socio-ecological relations so that the impact of social formations on local ecologies and Earth systems is reduced, notably by employing already existing renewable energy technologies to replace fossil fuels and nuclear power, as most mainstream environmentalists argue.

What makes the ecomodernists techno-utopian is not that they argue that technologies can play a role in reducing anthropogenic environmental destruction, but that they depict the obstacles to serious action to this end as technological rather than political, and suggest that if the world could just wait until the right technologies are developed then everything would be okay. In fact, many of the relevant technologies already exist; what is absent is political will to implement their development and use. It is not a utopian politics but a utopia that lacks politics.

It seems, then, that with regard to geo-social futures, it might be apt to adopt a Gramscian position: "pessimism of the intellect,

optimism of the will" – even if today the category of "will" too is uncertain, when the "end of Man" has pronounced the sovereign subject dead and the "end of Nature" declared a new era of multi-agental complexity. Despite contending visions of geo-social futures, it seems essential for the Left today to insist that pessimism is not the necessary correlate to the militant commitment to justice, care, and freedom, and that optimism must be cultivated, not despite worsening geo-social conditions, but precisely because of them. Without a commitment to the enduring possibility of a better world, we simply resign ourselves, and the planet, to extinction as usual.

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1
See, for example, T. J. Demos, "III. Against the Anthropocene," blog.fotomusuem.ch, May 25 2015; Andreas Malm "The Anthropocene Myth," *Jacobin*, May 30, 2015; and Kathryn Yusoff, "Geologic Life: Prehistory, Climate, Futures in the Anthropocene," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2013.

2
Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities*, 2015; Jason Moore, "The Capitalocene Part I: On the Nature & Origins of Our Ecological Crisis," 2014; and Lesley Green, "The Changing of the Gods of Reason: Cecil John Rhodes, Karoo Fracking, and the Decolonizing of the Anthropocene," *e-flux journal* 65, special issue on the theme "Supercommunity," June 9, 2015 http://supercommunity.e-flux .com/texts/the-changing-of-t he-gods-of-reason/

3
Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene," Nature, March 12, 2015.

4
Paul Ehrlich et al, "Accelerated modern human–induced species losses: Entering the sixth mass extinction," *Science Advances*, June 19, 2015. The team of researchers was led by Ehrlich, the author of the controversial 1968 book *The Population Bomb*.

5
The Earth After Us is the title of a book by Jan Zalasiewicz, the head of the working group at the International Commission on Stratigraphy assessing whether the Anthropocene should be accepted as an official periodization in geologic science. See also Alan Weisman's best-selling 2008 book *The Earth Without Us,* and *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* by Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, for other examples of the growing post-extinction genre in popular science.

6
Roy Scranton, "Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene," *New York Times*, November 10, 2013.

7
Erle Ellis, "Stop Trying to Save the Planet," *Wired*, May 6, 2009; Erle Ellis, "Forget Mother Nature: This is a World of our Making," *New Scientist*, June 14, 2011.

8
Ellis, "Stop Trying to Save the Planet."

9
Ellis, "Forget Mother Nature."

10
Ellis, "Stop Trying to Save the Planet"; Ellis, "The Planet of No Return: Human Resilience on an Artificial Earth," The Breakthrough Institute, Winter 2012; Ellis, "Forget Mother Nature."

11
Ellis, "Stop Trying to Save the Planet" and "Forget Mother Nature."

12
Ellis, "Forget Mother Nature."

13
Ellis, "The Planet of No Return."

14
The early Anthropocene hypothesis sits at some distance from dominant scientific opinion, which locates the origins of the Anthropocene in the massive intensification of carbon-heavy industrialization in the last two centuries or even just in recent decades. Although Ellis has been involved in the International Stratigraphic Commission's working group on the Anthropocene, he is relatively marginalized, as the vast majority of its members seek to locate the origins of the Anthropocene much later in the stratigraphic records than he does. It is also important to clarify that not all advocates of the early Anthropocene get behind Ellis's vision of a good Anthropocene. The originator of the hypothesis, the palaeoclimatologist William Ruddiman, is more circumspect about the nature of geo-social futures, remaining optimistic about human resilience in the long run but disturbed by the idea that his arguments are being used to claim that increasing fossil-fuel use does not threaten catastrophic environmental change. I focus here on Ellis because he is the most vocal and public proponent of the early Anthropocene hypothesis and is involved in attempting to alter climate policy with his public activities.

15
In 2004 the directors of The Breakthrough Institute, Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, coauthored a controversial paper entitled "The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World."

16
See Will Steffen et al, "The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship," *Ambio,* November 2011.

17
Mark Lynas, "A good Anthropocene? – speech to Breakthrough Dialogue 2015" http://www.marklynas.org/2015/06/a-good-anthropocene-speech-to-breakthrough-dialogue - 2015/

18
For example, authors of best-selling popular environmental science books like Diane Ackerman (*The Human Age: The World Shaped By Us*), Emma Marris (*Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World*), and Mark Lynas (*The God Species: Saving the Planet in the Age of Humans*); journalists such as Andrew Revkin, who runs the *New York Times*' "Dot Earth" environment blog; as well as think tanks like The Breakthrough Institute, Steve Brand's Long Now Foundation, and Future Earth (a United Nations–funded research platform that has a project on "Bright spots: seeds of a good Anthropocene," perhaps tellingly related to research in ecosystem services) are all associated with so-called new environmentalism. As for Ellis, he writes in popular magazines such as *Wired* and *New Scientist* and had a prominent role in the recent two-year Anthropocene Project at Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

19
Revkin's talk at the Association for Environmental Studies and Sciences conference in New York can be found on his blog at the *New York Times* http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/

20
Clive Hamilton, "The Delusion of the Good Anthropocene," June 17, 2014. To his credit, Revkin shared Hamilton's response on his blog and took part in a discussion with Hamilton hosted by the environmental news site *Grist*.

21
Clive Hamilton, "The New Environmentalism Will Lead Us to Disaster," *Scientific American*, June 19, 2014.

22
Hamilton in "Is the Anthropocene a World of Hope or a world of Hurt?," a discussion with Andrew Revkin and Nathaneal Johnson, *Grist*, July 7, 2014.

23
The Ecomodernist Manifesto, The Breakthrough Institute, 2015.

24
See the collectively authored piece "A Call to Look Past An Ecomodernist Manifesto: A Degrowth Critique" (PDF) http://www.resilience.org/articles/General/2015/05_May/A - Degrowth-Response-to-An-Eco modernist-Manifesto.pdf

25
Clive Hamilton, "The Technofix Is In: A Critique of the Ecomodernist Manifesto," *Earth Island Journal*, April 21, 2015. Hamilton was nonetheless invited to The Breakthrough Institute's Good Anthropocene conference, where he argued that the manifesto's argument followed an essentially theological structure. See Clive Hamilton, "The Theodicy of the Good Anthropocene," June 24, 2015.

26
Bruno Latour, "Fifty Shades of Green," June 2015 (PDF) http://bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/00-BREAKTHROUGH-06-15_0.pdf

27
Ibid.

28
Ibid.

29
Hamilton, 2014.

30
Ibid.

31
Ibid.

32
Latour, 2015.

33
Ibid.

34
For example, although Hamilton admits that "thinking about the politics of climate change is depressing" (Hamilton, 2014), he stands at some distance from the metaphysically morose Kingsnorth on the ultimate possibility, as opposed to likelihood, of the large-scale environmental and social transformation needed to secure a more socially just and ecologically sustainable geo-social future. Nonetheless, one of the most interesting aspects of the debates around potential geo-social futures is that they tend towards polemical polarization. This is hardly surprising given the stakes involved, but these polemics sometimes unearth an unexpected subterranean opposition between optimistic and pessimistic orientations, which cut across the expected Left-Right political axis and revealing strange and perhaps uncomfortable conceptual convergences.

35
David Brooks, "The Small, Happy Life," *New York Times*, May 29, 2015. Here, as so often, the moderate conservative (Brooks) and the disenchanted radical (Kingsnorth) enter into a peculiar consensus on the salve of the private sphere when the public disappoints. See Paul Kingsnoth, "Dark Ecology," *Orion Magazine*, December 21, 2012.

36
This retooling also applies to familiar modes of critical thought, some of which call out for an epistemological update. Some of the critiques of the Anthropocene concept have shown a reluctance to tarry with the limits of established critical maneuvers in the face of fundamental conceptual change, and have sometimes appeared to be forcing the toothpaste back in to the tube of familiar critiques. This is not to say that these critiques are wrong or

somehow unnecessary – on the contrary – but rather that they have limits with regard to concepts that emerge from very different domains that need to be recognized.

37
See Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, "Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics," 2013 http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-acceleration ist-politics/ Laboria Cuboniks, "Manifesto on Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation" 2015 http://www.laboriacuboniks.net/ Mark Fischer and Jeremy Gilbert, "Reclaim Modernity: Beyond Markets, Beyond Machines," *Compass*, 2014; Alberto Toscano, "The Prejudice Against Prometheus," *STIR*, Summer 2011. The impulse to reclaim the Left's orientation to the future common to these texts is one I share, but none have adequately accounted for the fundamental shift in planetary conditions within which this future will emerge.

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